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AUTHOR Costas, Elaine Fowler
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ABSTRACT

Although interviewing looks easy, it is much more complicated than it appears, and generally, students are not taught how to conduct an interview. Planning and preparation must include research about the subject of the interview and the person being interviewed. Good questions build on the question before, make the person being interviewed think, and sometimes surprise the interviewee. Questions which can be answered "yes" or "no," too personal questions, and questions with obvious answers should be avoided. Among types of interviews are: the fact interview, to obtain current information of general interest to the public; the biographical interview; the descriptive interview; and the personality or celebrity interview. Classroom applications are included. (CR)

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Teaching Interviewing Skills to Elementary Students

Elaine Fowler Costas

Interviews look easy. All one person has to do is ask questions and the other person answers. However, interviewing is much more complicated than it appears. The problem with interviewing is that is seems easy to do; therefore, teachers do not generally *teach* students how to conduct them. Not only are correct procedures not taught, interviewing itself is seldom practiced in classrooms throughout the country. When interviewing is assigned by the teacher or a student conducts an interview for a special project, it is usually taken for granted that students will know what to do. It is true that children are "interviewing" from the first day they ask a question. But asking questions is not the only component in an interview; however, it is a start. Interviewing as a speech activity is the natural outgrowth of the student's quest for knowledge (Logan, 1967). It is also a valuable social activity since it requires students to converse purposefully with others (Flanigan, 1977). Interviewing can also provide practice in notetaking, drawing conclusions, choosing a topic, and organizing thoughts. It can lead to an increased interest in writing and growth in self concept and self esteem. This paper will discuss how to teach formal interviewing skills and the various types of interviews students can learn to conduct.

Teaching Interviewing Skills

Preparations for interviewing are very important. Equipment needs range from pencil and paper to tape recorders, depending on the age of the student and the purpose of the interview. It is well to remind students that the courteous, intelligent behavior of the interviewer reflects on their school as well as on themselves. Hopefully, the students will discover that a successful interview requires both a friendly manner and careful preparation.

A formal interview can be requested via telephone, letter or in person. However the request is made, the purpose of the interview, as well as the location, time and length of time needed for the interview should be discussed. The interviewer then needs to research the subject about which the interview will be conducted, and the student needs to find out as much as possible about the person being interviewed. As a general rule, the more complex the interview assignment, the more thorough their research should be.

Part of the preparation phase consists of forming questions. Good questions are the key to successful interviewing and take careful planning. The questions should be written in advance. If the information desired involves detailed facts, a list of questions could be given to the person prior to the interview. Some tips for writing good questions are:

1. Good questions should be invitations to the person being interviewed.
2. Good questions make the person think.
3. Good questions build on one another.
4. Good questions sometimes surprise the person being interviewed.

(Olson, 1982)

Some questions to avoid are:

1. Yes/No questions--Do you have a job?
2. Nosy questions-- How often do you brush your teeth?
3. Obvious questions--What color is your hair?

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Obviously preparation plays a large part in the interview process. Students need to realize this if they hope to conduct a successful interview.

Actual Interview

Interviewing is one of the principal means in obtaining firsthand information. When conducting the actual interview, a major emphasis should be put on making the interviewee feel at ease. Rapport is very important. As the interview proceeds, one question should lead to another in an informal, conversational manner (Moyes, 1986). It is not a good idea to write down every word because the interviewee might become overly cautious thinking that his every word will appear in print. On the other hand, the interviewer must take care not to change the meaning of what the person said. The following be a helpful guide for students:

1. Prepare properly.
2. Introduce yourself and state the purpose of the interview
3. Have your questions written down so that you can stay with the topic.
4. Phrase questions carefully.
5. Listening carefully. Ask politely for more details when necessary.
6. Take notes during the interview
7. If you want to use as tape recorder, ask permission to use it from the person being interviewed.
7. Attribute statements accurately (know who said what).
8. Be courteous.
9. Find an appropriate way to end the interview when the allotted time has been reached.
10. Thank the person for the interview and the information.

Taking Notes

Taking good notes as you converse with your interviewee will help contribute to a successful interview. One way to take notes during an interview is to listen and write down key words. The interviewer does not want to write down every word spoken because the interviewee might become overly cautious thinking that every word they say will appear in print. On the other hand, the interviewer must take care not to change the meaning of what the person said After the interview, a good idea is to review your notes while the information is fresh in your mind.

Types of Interviews

There are at least nine different types of interviews. Once students know the basic steps involved in the actual interview and how to take notes, they must determine which kind of interview best suits the topic to be discussed and the persons to be interviewed (Moyes, 1986). The type of interview to be conducted may be decided by the teacher and/or the student. Some examples of interviews are:

1. Fact interview--The purpose in conducting a fact interview is to obtain current information and be of general interest to the reading/listening/viewing public. A news story is always better when the reporter can obtain as many facts as possible.
2. Roving-Reporter interview--This interview is conducted by a reporter/interviewer sampling public opinions " on-the-street." Interviews with passers-by are chosen at random and are usually asked the same question.
3. Question and Answer interview--This type of interview follows one of two formats. In one, there are no restrictions on the topics introduced for discussion

or on the questions put to the interviewee. In the other, questions are limited to previously agreed-on topics. But with either format, the interviewer must have clearly in mind the questions to ask.
4. Biographical interview--A person's life is the focus of this type of interview.
5. Historical interview. This is usually done when a reporter wishes to bring the reader/listener/viewer up-to-date on an event that happened years ago.
6. Descriptive interview--This type of interview is also known as the "what's it all about?" interview. This type might occur when the location of the interview or the physical appearance of the interviewee or the kind of work done may be more important than what the interviewee has to say. An example of a descriptive interview might be with a person who catches snakes with his bare hands for a hobby and is interviewed after he has caught the snake.
7. Personality interview--This type is usually conducted with a celebrity. Interviews with well-known persons attract peoples' attention because a close-up of that public figure is provided. It could focus on their achievements, mannerisms, personality traits, or recent experiences.
8. Composite interview--This type is much longer than the others (written and time-wise). It involves interviewing more than one person--sometimes as many as five or six. Also, this type of interview is likely to go into greater detail on the topic under consideration. Many composite interviews have other types intermingled with it (personality, biographical, etc.).

Classroom Applications.

Some ideas to encourage interviewing include the following.
1. Primary pupils, provided with a list of prepared questions, can be sent in small teams to interview the school nurse, cafeteria manager, custodians, and other school workers.
2. Two students can prepare and act illustrating what to do--or what not to do -- during an interviews. After the skit, they can participate in a class discussion of what was done correctly and what was not. Be prepared to offer suggestions for remedying any mistakes identified during the discussion.
3. Pupils' Birthdays. About one week before any member of the class celebrates his or her birthday, have classmates, prepare questions to ask about his or her family, pets, toys, favorite sports, or favorite movie or television stars. Later each pupil could write up the interview that takes place on the festive occasion. Children whose birthday occur in the summer or on weekends are allowed to choose alternate days for their interviews.
4. Have students practice interviewing. Pair up students and have them each write 5 questions to ask their partner. . Then they take turns interviewing each other, writing down their partner's answers to the questions. They could share some of the questions and answers with the class.
5. Have students interview themselves. Have them write questions and the answers.
6. Students could dramatize a 'Meet the "Press" type of interview and invite someone into the class or conduct telephone interviews with person in charge of local places of historical interest.
7. Ask each student to make up a profile of a fictitious character providing the following information.

a. name
b b. physical characteristics

c. age.
d. occupation
e. interests
f. other information.

The profiles are placed in a pile and students each select one and prepare 10 questions to ask the character in an interview. Then the students and the character's creator role-play an interview for the class. The students should be encouraged to make their questions and answers viable, but humorous. They could conduct the interview as if they were being held on a TV talk show called "Meet the Greats" (Thoburn, 1984).

8. To create a classroom event, arrange for several students to play a variety of favorite characters. Have another student play the role of a Talk Show host or hostess. The host/ess introduces the guests to the "studio" audience and gets them to talk about what is interesting about each one of them.
9. Students could conduct an imaginary, humorous interview with their dog or with the drinking fountain at school (Flanigan,1977).
10. Students can role play in Social Studies imaginary interviews between such personages as President George Washington and Governor William Bradford.
11. Interviews might be part of a process of finding out the answers to questions about what school drop outs say about their experiences.
12. Pupils can interview foreign exchange students as well as parents or teachers who have recently visited other countries.
13. Students could select a character they have met in a book they have just read. They could write an interview in which the character tells enough about the story to interest others in reading it. Then they could work with partners to dramatize the interviews for the class.
14. In "Digging in the Decades," students are told to get first-hand, eyewitness accounts from people who know things about the decade they selected to study (e.g. 1950).They need to record the date and name of the interview and interviewee and ask the eyewitness if they can see or borrow pictures, clippings, or clothes from that decade to make their report more interesting. (Olson,1982).

With all interview activities, students can learn about people around them, their environment, the past, and new relevant, interesting topics of information.

Evaluation

After students have conducted several interviews or practice interviews, the teacher could provide the students with a checklist which might include the following questions:

1. Did you research your interviewee?
2. Did you develop several key questions to guide the interview?
3. Did you try to establish rapport?
4. Did your questions flow in a conversational manner?
5. Did the interviewee understand your questions?
6. Did you use tact in keeping your interviewee on the topic?
7. Did you conclude the interview tactfully at the appropriate time?

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